



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
1803 W HWY 160
Monte Vista, Colorado 81144



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
Comfort Inn in Alamosa Colorado
July 26 and 27, 2006

MINUTES

ATTENDEES:

GROUP 1

Jim Coleman
Virginia Patton
Rick Thompson
Gene King
Chuck Rech

GROUP 2

Donna Murphy
Aaron Clark
Lucy Bambrey

GROUP 3

Loren Whittemore
Frances Mathews
Michael Bush

RAC Members not in attendance: Josh Osterhoudt, Jim Bensberg and Joseph Duda

GUESTS: No one from the public attended.

BLM/USFS PERSONNEL: Roy Masinton, Peter Clark, Jim Rhett, Ken Smith, Mark Swinney, Dean Erhard, Vince Spero, John Murphy, Cindy Rivera and Sherri Trujillo (recorder).

COUNCIL BUSINESS: Roy presented a plaque of appreciation to Rick Thompson whose term ends in August. Members Joe Duda and Josh Osterhoudt were not at the meeting and received their plaques by mail.

Loren Whittemore then read a letter to the RAC members from Josh Osterhoudt complimenting the BLM and Council members and thanking them for their assistance during his tenure as a RAC member.

Chuck Rech and Gene King's terms are ending and both have reapplied for another term. It is hoped that appointments will be made to the 6 positions by August 20, 2006 when the current members terms end.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Aaron Clark, at the request of Vera Smith of the Colorado Mountain Club, gave a handout to the RAC members regarding Colorado Mountain Club policy on recreation user fees on public lands. The team briefly reviewed the handout.

MANAGERS UPDATE:

Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Office:

Over the River proposal: After moving from doing an Environmental Analysis to an Environmental Impact Statement for the Over the River proposal, BLM began reassessing the

process. As a result, BLM may be doing a competitive bid process for a third party contractor to do the Environmental Impact Statement in accord with BLM policy.

Recreation RACs: Sally Wisely, the State Director for BLM, is looking into the Recreational RAC issue and may make a decision soon. This was discussed at the last meeting. They may set up a new Recreation RAC or possibly assign the task to existing RACs.

Gene King stated that he thought this RAC was already overwhelmed and could not handle the additional workload and they should forward this to a special Recreation RAC.

The discussion on a potential Resolution will be continued tomorrow.

Browns Canyon Legislation: The legislation to make the Browns Canyon WSA a Wilderness Area goes before the House Resources Committee, Forests & Forest Health Sub-Committee this week. There seems to be little opposition to this legislation.

San Luis Valley, Jim Rhett and Peter Clark

Village at Wolf Creek: The decision was made in March and there were four appeals to the Regional Forester on the decision. The decision was upheld by the Regional Forest on all decision points. The parties who appealed may pursue further legal actions but it is not believed they are doing so at this point.

Peter Clark stated that he had given access to the Village at Wolf Creek in two places; one is called the Snow Shed access and the other was an extension of the current road to the ski area (Road 391.) This included restrictions that the road to the ski area (391) could only be used by the Village at Wolf Creek in the winter for emergencies or with the mutual consent of CDOT and Wolf Creek Ski Area.

Insect and Disease – There is a significant insect and disease problem on County Line in Conejos County. The insect and disease has infected this area and there are large numbers of blue spruce timber that are already dead and many more dying from the infestation. Three to four salvage sales are expected to move it out. It is anticipated that 5 to 6 million board feet will be removed with the total amount being close to 30 million board feet by the time the project is completed.

Great Sand Dunes National Park – The Baca Ranch has approximately 13,000 acres of National Forest with no public access at this time. They are working with the National Park Service to remedy this situation.

Forest Service Elk Study – Michael Bush asked about the Forest Service Elk Study. He stated that the Sand Dunes is 4,000 animals over objective in that area and wanted to know how this

problem was going to be handled in order to thin them out. Jim Coleman stated that Colorado Division of Wildlife was issuing vouchers to thin this herd.

Michael also wanted to know if BLM or Forest Service is going to tag all cattle on their allotments because in New Mexico they have to tag every cow going on a grazing permit. They are using this method to help with disease control. Pete and Roy stated that neither the Forest Service or BLM are tagging animals.

Energy Development Potential for San Luis Valley Public Lands, Cindy Rivera

The San Luis Valley has received several wind energy inquiries and some BLM locations have become possible targets. The San Luis Hills Wilderness Study Area was one of the areas being asked about for a possible test station. Some areas are off limits due to being in Wilderness Study Areas. There needs to be two years of wind data collected on a site prior to making a decision about going forward. Rick Thompson said a big stumbling block for most of these projects is transmission, due to the inability to build on very high peaks etc.

Oil and Gas – In this area, there have been 16 leases on BLM public land and more are being requested. The Forest Service has no activity at this time, but recently processed 8 requests and received 104 more requests in May 2006, which are being mapped and processed. After working through the process, they will be available for open bid. Cindy stated that currently we have no producing wells on BLM or Forest Service land in the area. There is a minimum bid per acre set by Congress.

San Luis Valley Overview, Jim Rhett

Grazing Regulations: The BLM grazing regulations have been published and Jim Rhett reviewed the highlights. Basically the new regulations are aimed at promoting more effective and efficient management of public land grazing.

Simpson/McIntire: The new BLM National Planning Schedule has been issued and the Simpson/McIntire property is now on the list. Funding is a problem but BLM is hoping to get started on a plan amendment in FY07. For 2 seasons cattle grazed the property, but they are not grazing it now. BLM has basically been maintaining the property. One RAC member inquired about using goats to help control weeds, but Mark Swinney stated there were many issues with trying to use goats. Issues range from the administrative process to finding people with goats to do the work.

Drought Effects: The drought continues across the area even though there has been some nice precipitation lately, we are still not out of the woods. Significant snows are needed in the mountains this winter to help replace aquifer water. Permittees are backing off their numbers on allotments.

Forest Service Elk Study, Peter Clark: This study was undertaken because permittees felt there was an elk and cattle conflict for grazing on public lands. The study is no longer being done due to the fact that the Forest Service could not substantiate there was a conflict.

Range Recision & TPR's, Mark Swinney: Mark Swinney gave a brief overview of where the Forest Service and BLM are on range recision and the Technical Procedural Review. The schedule is progressing and Mark feels they are doing fairly well.

Gene King asked about Travel Management and Stone Quarry. Mark said travel management is still being worked on but there is no money to do an Environmental Analysis for Stone Quarry. Everything has gone to the contractor and they think the EA for travel management will be to the public for comment by September of 2006. The final decision is due in 2007.

Timber, Insect and Disease, and Stewardship, Dean Erhard: Due to the severe drought conditions and lack of cold winters in the past few years, timber stands are very susceptible and there is a considerable insect and disease problem on the Forest and BLM in this area. The largest problems are Spruce Beetle, Engleman Spruce Beetle and Mountain Pine Beetle. They are currently working on a huge timber sale on the Conejos Peak District to reduce the number of infected trees.

Timber, John Murphy: The Forest Plan calls for 10 million board feet (mbf) of timber to be removed each year with approximately 2 mbf in firewood permits and the other 8 mbf to timber sales. We currently have a dormant timber program in BLM. John said they had been given \$8,000 to do stand exams on BLM and the goal is to get a small BLM timber program going. A Stewardship Contract is being completed on the Antelope Trickle Mountain program and is going well. There is also a bug infestation problem.

National Historic Preservation Act, Lucy Bambrey: Lucy showed a power point on the National Historic Preservation Act. This act protects historic properties greater than 50 years of age. Cultural Resources are prehistoric sites, buildings structures, sacred landscapes etc. She explained the process for getting places placed on the historic registers.

Cultural Resources in the San Luis Valley, Vince Spero: Vince showed a power point on the type of cultural resources found in the San Luis Valley and surrounding mountain areas. There are numerous rock art sites, historic rock images, archaic nomadic groups of figures, abstract pictographs near La Garita, culturally pealed trees and many more in this area. Vince stated that there have been limited amounts of pottery in the area. They recently found a new site where they are working in the flat tops in Conejos County and are finding interesting artifacts as well, in the Old Spanish Trail area.

The meeting ended for the day at 5:15 p.m.

July 27, 2006

The Front Range RAC Members spent the day on a Field Tour to the Rio Grande River to look at the riparian vegetation regeneration and cultural resources.

Following the tour, the Council continued their discussion from Wednesday, on Recreation RACs. The following Resolution was unanimously passed: The Front Range Resource Advisory Council recommends that a Recreation Resource Advisory Council be established separate from the Front Range RAC, as provided for in the Recreation Enhancement Act. If a Recreation RAC is established, this Council recommends that one of its members serve as a liaison with the Recreation RAC to provide communications between the two Councils.

The next Front Range RAC meeting will be September 19, 2006 in Canon City.

The Meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Roy L. Masinton
Royal Gorge Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Loren R. Whittemore
Chairman
Front Range Resource Advisory Council